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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/18/2015  
TAGS: [PBTS](#) [PHSA](#) [PREL](#) [EFIS](#) [MOPS](#) [KSAC](#) [JA](#)  
SUBJECT: ROKG READOUT ON MARITIME RESOLUTION WITH JAPAN

REF: A. SEOUL 1323

- [B](#). SEOUL 1314
- [C](#). SEOUL 1271
- [D](#). SEOUL 1246

Classified By: POL M/C Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

#### SUMMARY

[1](#). (C) MOFAT DG for the Asian and Pacific Affairs Bureau Lee Hyuk on April 24 told POL M/C that Seoul was relieved that it managed the maritime survey dispute and prevented a worsening of the already strained relationship with Tokyo. Both sides agreed that (1) Japan would recall its ships and drop its current survey plan; (2) the ROKG would maintain the right to name undersea features in its exclusive economic zone at an appropriate time (meaning after the International Hydrographic Organization meeting in June); and (3) Seoul and Tokyo would resume discussions on resolving EEZ disputes as soon as possible, perhaps in May. Lee emphasized that the ROKG had stuck to its initial position and was relatively satisfied, despite domestic criticism for not being tough enough with Japan. Seoul planned to conduct its own surveys, perhaps in July, in waters that Tokyo might consider to be overlapping EEZs. South Korea also intended to submit new names of underwater features to the IHO next year. Lee appealed for USG efforts to persuade Japan not to repeat its most recent provocation. END SUMMARY.

ROKG STRATEGY: CONSTRUCTIVE AMBIGUITY  
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[2](#). (C) In an April 24 meeting with POL M/C, Lee Hyuk, Asian and Pacific Affairs Bureau DG Lee Hyuk, expressed relief that Seoul negotiated an understanding with Tokyo that essentially maintained the ROKG's initial position, despite some domestic criticism that it had not been tough enough. South Korean and Japanese diplomats on April 22 agreed to a three-point understanding: (1) Japan would recall its survey ships; (2) Korea maintained the right to name undersea features within its EEZ at an appropriate time; and (3) the two sides would hold discussions on delineating their EEZs perhaps as soon as May.

[3](#). (C) Lee emphasized that Seoul successfully rebuffed Japanese efforts that could have weakened South Korean sovereignty to the islet of Dokdo (Takeshima) and the

surrounding waters. It maintained the precondition that Tokyo first had to drop its plan to dispatch survey ships to the region before anything could be agreed. Thereafter Seoul emphasized that it still had the right to name undersea features within its EEZ, but that it would proceed with such efforts after necessary preparations were completed. Lee said that Japan was allowed to explain that it understood the term "appropriate time" to mean that Seoul would not submit names to the International Hydrographic Organization in June, even though Seoul did not explicitly say this. The ROKG position was to neither deny nor endorse that Japanese interpretation.

¶4. (C) Lee said the discussions over the weekend nearly ruptured a couple of times. The talks began at 5:30pm Friday night and went until midnight before resuming at 5:30am on Saturday. Around 3:30pm Saturday, the South Korean side was ready to say the talks had failed. Still, talks continued. Later, around 7:00pm South Korean negotiators were again ready to quit and were on their way back to MOFAT before receiving a call from the Japanese side to return. Lee reported that the Japanese side then yielded. Earlier Japanese proposals included joint maritime surveys in waters that Tokyo claimed were in overlapping EEZs; Seoul, however, responded that there were no areas of overlapping EEZs.

¶5. (C) Lee opined that Japanese Vice Foreign Minister Yachi came to Seoul looking for an amicable solution and proved to be reasonable and forthcoming. Yachi reportedly faced criticism from conservatives in Japan for his initiative to visit Seoul, and therefore was open to the risk that the talks could have proven unsuccessful.

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TOUGH SEAS AHEAD  
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¶6. (C) The agreement bought both side time, Lee asserted, but what was needed was to convince Tokyo not to create another provocation because the ROKG could not tolerate any challenges to South Korean sovereignty over Dokdo. The ROKG could not and would not change its plan to conduct scientific surveys in July of South Korean EEZ waters, some of which Japan might consider as an area of overlapping EEZs. Perhaps next year, Seoul would submit names for undersea features within its EEZs. It was unclear how Tokyo would protest either of these actions. Should Japan respond with a similar provocation, South Korea would have to take defensive action.

¶7. (C) Lee said that President Roh was also quite firm on the issue of Dokdo, noting that Roh would make a statement on April 25 about the agreement and Korea's relations with Japan. Lee did not preview the message but indicated that, since the negotiations over the weekend were conducted under Roh's instructions, his statement would probably be consistent with the resolution.

¶8. (C) Lee concluded the meeting by appealing for USG efforts to persuade Japan not to repeat this type of provocation. Seoul hoped that Washington would seek to restrain Tokyo.

VERSHBOW